

Some inaudible answer came to the doctor. The chaplain closed his eyes. Dr. Teesdale knelt as he heard the words of the absolution.

At the close there was silence again. "I can hear nothing more," said the chaplain, replacing the receiver. Presently the doctor's man servant en-

tered with the tray of spirits and a glass. Dr. Teesdale pointed to the rope that lay in the center of the room. "Take that and burn it, Parker," he said. "I want it burned at once." That night at the prison all was quiet. There were no nightmares, no screaming in sleep.

HIS NEIGHBOR'S SON

A SHORT STORY

BY ELEANOR M. INGRAM

THE heavy riding-whip was flung across the barn with a gesture as violent as the use to which it had just been put; the tall, powerful old man who had held it turned on his heel with a grim finality and certainty of results.

"Think twice next time," he gave curt advice, in departing.

There was no reply.

The boy to whom the caution was addressed, leaned against the frame of the open window, his face averted from the sunny, fragrant interior, and the man who was leaving it, his shoulders heaving irregularly with the difficult breathing of one compelling self-control in pain.

There was a young dignity investing him that even the circumstances could not lower, but to hold that dignity upright, he needed a moment without speech, an interval for recovery.

John Sutherland, standing unnoticed in a doorway opposite to the one by which the old man had left, divined that need and deliberately ministered to it, neither speaking nor moving to pursue the inquiry that had brought him there.

He had never before seen this boy, yet he experienced a clairvoyant sense of understanding him, and he studied him with attentive keenness.

He was some fifteen or sixteen years of age, Sutherland judged; well, even hand-

somely dressed in riding-costume, as the older man had been, and of slim, erect figure.

Sutherland's desire to see the averted face intensified with each moment of quiet waiting, until at last he made a purposeful abrupt step forward.

"I beg pardon, but I couldn't get any one's attention," he spoke. "I am hunting a blacksmith."

The boy turned at once; turned to Sutherland a finely-cut, dark young face of arresting vividness and resolution. He was still very pale, but his unquelled grey eyes met the visitor's with direct penetration.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, and paused. "You saw—"

"As I came up," Sutherland acknowledged. "I could not avoid it, indeed."

Hot color flared up in the white cheeks; the boy's lips compressed, but his dark gaze hardened to arrogant rejection of sympathy.

"You saw me with my father, sir. There was nothing to be avoided. If you like, I will show you the way to a blacksmith." The words were little, the glance and pause were much.

It was then John Sutherland fell in love deeply and irretrievably.

Not love as between man and woman but, nevertheless, love at first sight, the love that stands up and clamors for possession.

He continued to look at the boy, and

there was a space before he spoke, quite irrelevantly:

"How old are you?"

"I am sixteen."

"And you stand *that*? You do not get out of here—earn a place, however poor, to eat and sleep in freedom? You take the lash so hardly, yet stand it?"

The open challenge of the demand excused its liberty. Answering ardor flashed into the boy's expression, and his swift reply leaped forth.

"Do you suppose I haven't wanted to go?" he retorted, flinging back his dark head. "Do you suppose I am afraid to start out alone? I'm staying here because of my mother, sir, and I'll keep right on staying. Stand it? Yes, as long as she wants me."

Sutherland advanced a pace and offered his hand, raising the motor-cap from his graying hair.

"I ask your pardon," he briefly apologized. "If you will show me where I can have my machine patched up, I'll be much obliged. My name is John Sutherland."

The boy gave the clasp with a firm warmth beyond his years.

"I am Gayle Elton, and I'll be glad to show you the smithy, Mr. Sutherland."

He picked up his coat and slipped it on over the thin white shirt that was cut and torn here and there.

Watching, Sutherland's blue-black eyes kindled oddly.

"If you were my son, Gay, we'd settle our differences some other way, or not at all," escaped him.

Startled, the boy regarded him. That cordial, intimate use of his name sank deeper than any one ever fathomed.

"I fancy your sons are pretty happy," he mused wistfully.

"I have no son."

They passed out together and down the broad driveway.

The air was rich in the fragrance of countless blossoming grape-vines, the light breezes of very early spring were stirring over the silver river.

"I struck a hole in the road and broke a front spring," Sutherland observed. "I have never been in this part of the Hudson Valley; it is superb. But I did not know that any one raised grapes in quantity around here."

Gayle halted, his gray eyes scanning the exquisite domain; terrace above terrace,

rolling hill succeeding rolling hill, acres of soft green vineyards rising from the river-shore to the mountain-top.

"No one does," he affirmed, "except my father. All you can see between those cliffs, north and south, is his land. It has been Elton's land since 1728. The house," he nodded toward the large, somberly handsome building central in the sea of leaves, "has stood since the first Gayle Elton came from England. They say that he shot down his son-in-law on the newly laid threshold."

"His daughter had married against his command, and when she brought her young husband home the father killed him. The place is full of legends, not very gentle ones, I am afraid. We are not a gentle race."

"My father peddled fish, and I never heard of my grandfather," Sutherland dryly returned. "I am what they call a self-made millionaire. Do you think the less of me?"

Gayle glanced at the wide-browed, strong face, with its dormant force and humor, and looked away.

"Better ask if I envy you your chance," he countered with bitterness.

That retort betrayed a history of repression. And it first awoke John Sutherland to a hope that caught his breath with its possibilities. They walked on, both silent.

In the road a white automobile was waiting.

"Won't you come along," Sutherland invited. "I can bring you back after the smith finishes, you *know*."

He was afraid of being refused, and he was planning a fixed campaign. But Gayle readily accepted.

"I'd like to. My father hates motor-cars; he prefers to keep fast horses."

Sutherland drove slowly, and chatted with Gayle Elton, meanwhile, of everything suggested by the place and moment. The smithy was in the village, a mile distant.

"That spring will take an hour to fix, and it's noon. Come to lunch with me," Sutherland proposed.

Gayle hesitated, a curious shadow crossing his expression, then abruptly yielded.

They lunched opposite each other, in the country hostelry.

Sutherland ate little; he was imagining this boy-man at table with him in great hotels, at his clubs, moving in his house where the name of son was never spoken.

He was as earnestly, as romantically in love as a man enamoured of a girl-beauty, as eager for conquest.

"I will drive you back to your house," he declared, at the meal's conclusion. "I want to talk more with you, Gay."

The boy looked up quickly.

"Thank you, sir, but I should rather walk. I am not in a hurry to get back; it's too late—"

He checked himself, leaving the sentence unfinished. But Sutherland had matched his guest's expression with the one with which the luncheon had been accepted, and divined the truth.

"You mean your father will not like your having stayed with me?" he asked.

Gayle shrugged his shoulders, and winced at the thoughtless movement.

"No, he will not; considering that this morning's row was over my absence without leave yesterday."

"Yet you stayed?"

"I wanted to be with you for a while," avowed Gayle Elton, his voice low. "It was worth the price. But I will walk home, thanks."

Sutherland leaned forward.

"Gay, I have wanted a son all my man's life," he stated. "I want you; you are the son I used to dream of having, before my wife died in the first year of our married life."

"Come with me and take all I can give—it's a good deal. Come now; tell your mother you are where you will be happier. She will be content to know it; she can't like to see you handled as you are."

Amazed, the boy stared at him.

"You are asking *me*?"

"Yes. Can you trust yourself to me?"

They looked at each other squarely, eyes to eyes.

"I wish I had been born your son," said Gayle quietly. "But, I wasn't. And I can't come, Mr. Sutherland. My mother is an invalid; if I left her, she would die."

"She doesn't know all that goes on between my father and me. Besides, I won't have him write me down coward and run-away. He treats me as his father treated him; the Eltons are heavy-handed and hot-tempered."

"You—"

"I am like my mother, they say. My father and I clash, and I pay. I'll never forget that you asked me, never; but I'll stay it out here."

The decision was final. John Sutherland recognized it.

"I am sorry, Gay," he regretted, without anger. "I won't urge you. But I am going to have you yet. I can wait a bit."

They stood up to shake hands in farewell.

There are such things as days of encounter. Half an hour after he left John Sutherland, Gayle turned an angle of the forest road and found himself facing another stranger whom he was not to forget.

She was such a girl child as he had never seen; fragile, yet glowing with radiant health; most frankly natural, yet a finished perfection of cultivated daintiness.

Her heavy masses of fair hair had fallen about her face as she bent over the fern-edged spring, but she shook them back to turn upon Gayle the laughing appeal of her candid dark-blue eyes.

"There is no cup," she deplored, with a child's graceful freedom. "Justine has gone to find one, but I am so thirsty."

He came over to her.

"Make a cup of your hands," he advised.

"The water runs out."

"Put leaves in, then. Let me show you how."

She held the pink cup of her hands to him to line it with fresh leaves. They laughed together over the operation, instant friends.

"My name is Virginia; I am fourteen to-day," she informed him, her red mouth redder from the cool water, bright eyes gemming her brighter hair. "What's yours?"

"Gayle Elton. You aren't alone here in the woods, surely?"

"My maid is with me. I never am alone. We will go back to the car presently. I wanted to take a walk out here while we were waiting for it to start, and I can do whatever I like to-day because it is my birthday. You have been riding, haven't you?"

"Yes, this morning. Why?"

"I wondered if that was how you lost your hand; if you were thrown. I can ride myself."

His glance fell upon the crimson mark crossing his wrist, and he flushed deeply.

"I never was thrown by a horse yet," he answered. "That was—was another accident. It is nothing."

He looked in the direction of the distant railroad track, where its metallic gleam

crossed the path. "You had better call your nurse; the cars leave in a few minutes."

"Our car?" She rose. "We must go, then. I see Justine coming. Good-by, Gay."

The boy started, taken by surprise.

"Gay? Why do you call me that?"

"Isn't it short for Gayle? Doesn't any one call you names for short because they like you? Don't you like me to do it?"

The innocent question, the thought of the man who that morning had also called him Gay, affected Gayle like the closing of a hand upon his heart.

"No, no one does. Yes, I like you to," he hurried incoherently. "Will you shake hands for good-by, Virginia?"

"Of course."

She placed her diminutive hand in his, her warm eyes smiling up at him. "We will remember each other, won't we? Are you pretty good at remembering, Gay?"

"Yes, I am," said Gayle Elton.

He was. And so was John Sutherland.

During the year that followed Sutherland thought much of the boy on the Hudson estate.

He used to evoke Gayle's slim, upright figure as a daily companion; he made that image part of his life and plan of living.

At the core of his busy and successful life had long lain one frustrated wish, and now that wish had become tangible and was embodied in Gayle Elton.

His son—that was how he mentally designated the boy. There were times when he raged in dumb, helpless wrath at the thought of the grim old man who ruled at pleasure *his son*.

At the end of the year he went back. This time he found Gayle on the sunny road, alone.

"Are you ready to come yet, Gay?" he asked.

Touched to the heart, Gayle stood still, gazing at him with a certain incredulity.

"You still remember, sir?" he marveled.

"I want you."

The boy slowly shook his head.

"I can't, Mr. Sutherland. I—you can't guess how much you mean to me and how I have thought of you, but I can't come."

"Your mother?"

"She is very ill."

John Sutherland returned to New York to wait.

It was a year later that he saw announced

the death of Mrs. Mark Elton, of Elton Manor, on the Hudson.

There are certain decencies of tact among modern people. Sutherland possessed himself in patience and waited another full year before going to the house set among the vineyards. But he went then, assured of victory.

Gayle was riding when they met, and swung from his saddle to give greeting to the man who descended from his motor-car.

"Are you coming with me now?" asked Sutherland, contentedly sure of the reply.

Gayle folded his arms, grave eyes resting on the Elton domain spread around and below them in flowering luxuriance.

He was a man now, in his twentieth year; tall, straight, with an old-world dignity.

The fine horse nestled his head against his master's shoulder, confident of meeting gentleness from him, as they stood together. For the first time, Sutherland felt a chill of doubt, an uncertainty of conquest.

"I want you badly," he urged. "You don't know the life I have planned for my son Gay."

"It isn't what you can give that tempts me; it's you," Gayle corrected. "I never cared for any one as I do for you. But this is the place I was born to; what excuse have I got for leaving it?"

"I am the last Elton, you know. If I go, my father will not forgive me, and there is no one to take my place. Such things are out of date, you'll say. You are right, but I've been brought up to think of them and I can't shake them off."

"Of course, the days when my father handled me roughly are past, although I am not pretending that he makes living pleasant. It seems to me that, since I have no good reason for going, I must stay."

"I want you," Sutherland reiterated.

Gayle turned clear eyes to him.

"I want *you*," he responded. "Do we have everything we want?"

There was no answer to that.

"You have no good reason to go," Sutherland repeated, after a long silence. "What would be a good reason, I wonder?"

Gayle smiled, yet was seriously attentive.

"How can I tell, sir? If ever he and I lock wills, something will break. That may happen any day, or it may never happen."

"He is commencing to discuss my marriage with a cousin. The day I first met you, I saw a little girl here on the road with her nurse. She was a stranger; I never saw her again."

"She told me she was called Virginia. If I ever marry, it will be a girl with eyes like hers. I saw you and her on the same day; I have always thought of you both as different from any one else."

John Sutherland drew a deep breath, as a runner takes breath after a long journey.

"Well, if you marry, bring your wife home to me," he invited. "I'll take care of you both. I am going now; I can see there is no use of urging you. And I don't think I'll come back, Gay; I think I'll wait for you to come to me, this time."

Gayle Elton had fancied himself accustomed to loneliness, but the knowledge that John Sutherland had gone not to return left the present and future blank. And that blankness ached.

The days that ensued were hard to endure.

It was two weeks after Sutherland's final departure that Gayle, riding down the mountain, came upon a girl in white who bent over the old spring, a tiny dog in her arms. She had fair hair—

Gayle reined his horse to a standstill, and leaned forward, breathing checked.

The girl raised to him candid, virginal dark-blue eyes, set in a young face like a flower.

"Oh!" she uttered, arrested. "Oh!" You are the boy!"

"You are Virginia!" he said, his voice roughened by tension.

"You are Gay Elton. Why, we are *both* good at remembering!"

He felt his heart shake within him; something like the flash of a silver sword fell across his life and severed him from all places except the one where she stood with him.

He dismounted and came toward her, carefully gentle as one who seeks to close his hand upon some bright-plumaged bird of passage.

Later they descended the path together, Gayle's horse stepping beside him, Virginia's toy spaniel curled on his arm.

Everything about her showed fairy-fine to him; her delicate gown, her ribbon-bound curls, her transparent skin, even her little shoes were white, high-heeled extravagances of daintiness, and her dog a mere floss-silk plaything.

She was staying at the village hotel with an elderly companion, a Mrs. Sands, she told him.

Gayle inferred that the lady was a relative and Virginia was Virginia Sands, and

the young girl did not contradict him. He lunched with the two ladies that day.

The grapes were in bloom, Cyprian madness was in the spring air they breathed.

Day and evening, for a week, twenty years wooed eighteen with the splendid fervor and recklessness of youth and first passion.

On the eighth day Virginia ran into the hotel room to hide her rose-hued confusion and high pride on Mrs. Sands's bosom.

"I am engaged to Gayle Elton," she panted happily. "He loves me, me!"

Gayle rode straight home to tell his father. He had not considered consequences or the future; he went without either fear or defiance.

But he wanted peace; the touch of Virginia's lips consecrated him from all evil thoughts.

In all his life he never had felt so gently toward the man who had tyrannically ruled it, or so near affection for him. He even imagined a new era at Elton House, made beautiful by the presence of his young wife.

What took place at that interview between father and son was never told by either man. But two hours later Gayle returned to Virginia, white-faced and stern in determination.

"Marry me now, to-day!" he asked simply.

"Gay?" she faltered, dismayed and awed by the change in him.

He caught her vehemently in his arms and she felt him shaken from head to foot.

"I love you! Come to me, trust me—I can take care of you, I will. Let us not lose each other. I love you, Virginia!"

Innocently she clasped her arms around his neck and they kissed each other.

They were married in the village rectory before sunset. Mrs. Sands offered no objections and asked no questions, strangely passive.

Nor had Gayle time to wonder at the carelessness of the guardian who thus gave the young girl to a man of whom she knew little or nothing.

Gayle had planned to take his wife down the river to New York. But when they went down to the wharf, it was not a river-boat which received them. Nor was it a river captain who met them on the yacht's gleaming deck, in the sunset glow of color.

"Mr. Sutherland!" Gayle exclaimed amazed.

But Virginia Elton ran into John Sutherland's arms with a glad little cry.

"Father!" she sobbed breathlessly.
"Father!"

Holding her close, Sutherland fixed indulgent, victorious eyes upon his son-in-law. He said nothing in that moment of ultimate triumph; there was no need to explain his last campaign or Virginia's unconscious share in it.

When he did speak, the note in his voice was not of triumph, but of proprietorship.

"She didn't know, Gay," he signified. "I just sent her up here and told her to use her governess's name to escape the society reporters who are always following people around. I thought I could trust things to work out right, and they have. Shall we go below? Your rooms have been ready these three years."

He held out his hand, and Gayle Elton laid his in it.

MR. MARX'S SECRET*

BY E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

PHILIP MORTON, a child of eight, walking with his mother, comes unexpectedly upon the murdered body of his father. The crime takes place in the wood leading to Ravenor Castle, and one John Francis, who disappears, is accused of the crime. Mr. Ravenor, the owner of the castle, offers a large reward for the murderer's capture. Later Mr. Ravenor calls on Mrs. Morton and agrees to educate the boy, Philip Morton. Mrs. Morton accepts his offer. The boy follows Mr. Ravenor out of the house and on returning finds his mother in a mysterious faint. Philip Morton meets Mr. Marx in the castle. As he returns he hears a terrifying cry along the avenue, and soon runs upon Mr. Marx, who offers no explanation. When Philip arrives home he finds his mother greatly troubled.

On the moor Philip Morton and Mr. Marx are attacked by a lunatic, over whom much mystery hangs. Philip takes his mother to a monastery in the hills where she wishes to go for rest. Then she dies suddenly, leaving a letter appointing Ravenor his guardian. Then Philip is informed he was also left considerable money, and is started on a social career.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Leonard de Cartienne.

WE all three stood and looked at one another for a moment, Milly Hart with her finger still pointing to the vacant place where the photograph had been.

"We're looking very tragical about it," Cecil said lightly. "Mysterious joint disappearance of Leonard de Cartienne and a photograph of Mr. Hart. Now, if it had been a photograph of a pretty girl instead of a middle-aged man, we might have connected the two. Hallo!"

He broke off in his speech and turned round. Standing in the doorway, looking at us, was Leonard de Cartienne, with

"Behold the missing link—I mean man!" exclaimed Cecil. "Good old Leonard! Do you know, you gave us quite a fright. We expected to find you here and the room was empty. Are you better?"

"Yes, thanks! I'm all right now," he answered. "I've been out in the yard and had a blow. What's Milly looking so scared about? And what was it I heard you say about a photograph?"

"Father's likeness has gone," she explained, turning round with tears in her eyes. "It was there on the mantelpiece this afternoon, and now, when we came in to look at it, it has gone."

"I should think that, if it really has disappeared," De Cartienne remarked incredulously, "the servant must have